

Congresswoman Kosmas Continues Fight to Eliminate Hard Deadline for Shuttle Retirement

Sends Letter to Budget Committees Urging Flexibility for the Shuttle Program

(Washington, DC) — Today, Congresswoman Suzanne Kosmas (FL-24), urged her House and Senate colleagues to include in the final budget resolution a Senate provision that removes the hard deadline for Shuttle retirement. Kosmas sent a letter to the chairs and ranking members of the House and Senate Budget Committees outlining the risks associated with a hard deadline and expressing the need to give NASA the funding and flexibility to fly the current Shuttle manifest into 2011.

“The Senate’s budget recognizes the risks and undue schedule pressure associated with a fixed retirement date and approves shuttle funding through FY 2011,” Congresswoman Kosmas wrote. “Removing the arbitrary deadline will help us preserve our highly-skilled and dedicated workforce, enabling the transfer of more workers to Constellation programs.”

Congresswoman Kosmas also reiterated her call for the president to quickly name a new NASA administrator. Last month, Kosmas led 13 of her colleagues from the bipartisan NASA House Action Team in sending a letter to President Obama urging him to name a new administrator as soon as possible.

“Now, more than ever, NASA needs leadership and direction to deal with its growing challenges,” said Kosmas. “I hope the president will quickly take action and appoint a NASA Administrator who understands these challenges and who is focused on minimizing the spaceflight gap.”

The full text Congresswoman Kosmas’s letter to the Budget Committees can be found below:

Dear Chairman Spratt, Chairman Conrad, Ranking Member Ryan and Ranking Member Gregg:

As you work to draft a conference agreement on the budget resolution, I strongly urge you to adopt a provision included in the Senate’s budget that would provide an additional \$2.5 billion for NASA’s shuttle program in Fiscal Year 2011. Providing this funding will ensure that NASA will be able to safely complete construction of the International Space Station (ISS), fulfill our international obligations, and reduce the impending spaceflight gap.

The Senate’s budget recognizes the risks and undue schedule pressure associated with a fixed retirement date and approves shuttle funding through FY2011. This will ensure that NASA will be able to fly at least through the end of

calendar year 2010 and into 2011 if necessary in order to fulfill its manifest and complete ISS construction and utility flights, as authorized by Congress in the NASA Authorization Act of 2009. With only 12% of flights launching on time, this is the most prudent course of action.

The need to extend the shuttle program's arbitrary retirement date was clearly demonstrated by the most recent shuttle mission, which was delayed a month to adequately address equipment issues. Shuttle workers used this precious time to successfully address technical issues, resulting in a safe and successful mission to deploy the space station's final set of solar arrays.

In Florida, the retirement of the shuttle will have an immense economic impact, as every job at Kennedy Space Center creates an additional 2.8 jobs throughout Florida. Without taking action to reduce the spaceflight gap, tens of thousands of Floridians could be added to the state's already record unemployment numbers during these tough economic times. Removing the arbitrary deadline will help us preserve our highly-skilled and dedicated workforce, enabling the transfer of more workers to Constellation programs that are scheduled to come online in the middle part of the next decade.

Schedule flexibility is also necessary in order to complete construction and ensure viability of the International Space Station, which is a unique foreign policy and scientific tool. Research conducted aboard the ISS, which has been designated as a National Laboratory, could lead to innovations that could improve the quality of life for all Americans and enable us to address important issues facing our nation, including developing alternative energy, improving health care, strengthening commerce and communications, and studying and better understanding climate change. These advancements will only be possible if we allow NASA to complete the shuttle manifest based on a flexible schedule to deliver necessary hardware and scientific tools.

By adopting the Senate's provision to give NASA additional time and flexibility to complete its manifest, we will avoid creating undue schedule pressure that could increase risks, reduce the spaceflight gap, complete ISS construction, and retain our highly-skilled workforce. This additional funding will also ensure that NASA will be able to deliver the Alpha-Magnetic Spectrometer to the ISS, a flight that has been authorized but not funded, and avoid diverting funds from other programs as it has in the past. It is especially vital to ensure that funding for the next generation of spacecraft is not affected.

I urge you to take these factors into account and to remove this arbitrary deadline by adopting the Senate's funding for the shuttle program in FY2011.

Sincerely,

Suzanne M. Kosmas

Member of Congress

